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The Hon. John Hay

An Appreciation

By

Hiram C. Hayden

THE HON. JOHN HAY

SECRETARY OF STATE

AN APPRECIATION

A DISCOURSE

BY

HIRAM C. HAYDN

IN

THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

July 16, 1905

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"I will make a man more rare than fine gold, even a man than the pure gold of Ophir."—ISAIAH, xiii. 12.

"This is one element in the judgment that the prophet sees coming upon the world for its iniquity—at once cause and effect—that men of honor, integrity and faithfulness become more rare than fine gold. And there in no calamity like this—the rarity of men in city, State or nation, in places of trust and responsibility, with high ideals of integrity and patriotism and the will to stand by them. Every other sort of calamity affecting civic interests can be borne if the right sort of men are found for counsel and for action. They will find a way or make one.

"The history of our time gives terrible emphasis to the calamitous effect of an awakening to the fact of the rarity of leaders, at once capable and honest; fitted by nature and by training for grave responsibilities, and also patriotic and trustworthy.

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Gen. M. H. H. H. H. H.
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“We have the spectacle of a great nation floundering like a rudderless ship in stormy seas. Her autocracy and bureaucracy wrecked the manhood of her leaders and her wrecked leaders have made of the nation a spoil. Russia struggles with a forlorn hope. How are the mighty fallen! In Russia a man is more rare than the pure gold of Ophir.

“Here, where democracy boasts its triumphs, the revelations of the last year or two have startled and shocked public confidence, as in swift succession men, pilloried for evil doing, have come down from their high places to pay the penalty of their crimes, till leaders with clean hands and pure hearts are more rare than gold. The hideous lust for gold has made men more rare than gold, and the end is nowhere in sight.

“At such a time, we are called to mourn the loss of a man who combined the rarest gifts, the most varied experiences and enjoyed the richest opportunities which led up to grave responsibilities, to be accepted and met in a large and catholic fashion, un-

til he stood confessed one of the master spirits of the world.

“This is not the estimate of provincial pride or partiality. It is evidenced by voices speaking the varied tongues of men, of all sects and nationalities, as they face the fact that Secretary of State John Hay is no more of earth.

“Since this is so, it is grateful to think that he once lived in our city, married into one of the families from early days prominent in all that concerned this church and community, that children were born to him here, that he worshipped with us habitually, that his grave is among our graves, and pilgrim feet will turn to the spot where his dust lies, and recall the deeds that gave him fame and honor among men, and turn away to lead better lives.

“It seems not unfitting, therefore, that in spite of more august assemblies in all lands, where American citizens are found and more elaborate eulogies are uttered, we should devote this morning to his memory—who was not less a Christian than a statesman, not less devout than patriotic, whose

high ideals and law of life were drawn from the New Testament.

“It is not my thought to sketch his life or catalogue his public deeds, of such far-reaching and international consequence, but to concern myself with the man and the manhood that made his life beautiful and illustrious.

“We have in Secretary John Hay a nature and a temperament sensitively strung, poetic, imaginative, with a keen sense of the beautiful, the true and the good, which fitted him, first of all, for poetry, art and literature, as a form of expression, and rose into the realm of life and conduct in a scorn of the mean and vulgar, and a passion for righteousness and justice between man and man, nation and nation, and then, fitness in worship—reverence, sincerity, humility.

“Upon a nature thus gifted, home and school and church, nature, travel and contact with men, with democracy, and the doings of courts in lands ruled by kings; and, best of all, Abraham Lincoln, laid their fashioning hands to mold the man we

loved, cherished and admired—whose memory is precious.

“The poetic gift was earliest developed, as was not unnatural—the play of a nature not yet burdened with the cares of life, or a sense of the good and evil bound up in it.

“He wished, in later life, that these earlier effusions could be effaced. I cannot so wish. None of us could have endured to see him issuing these ‘ballads’ as Ambassador to the court of Queen Victoria, or as Secretary of State; nor, of course, would it have been possible to him, but for the youth, John Hay, it was possible and fit; for, mind you, there is in them the ring of a note that vibrated to the end of his life virile with praise of the brave, daring and true, though clad in the coarse garb and voiced in the vernacular of rough, unlovely men. No person of sense will fail to put them in their historic place, nor think of them as the measure of the man. Then, he could not have written the later poems which breathe a lofty faith and are touched and colored by the experiences of a

man who has been long in the school of life, or 'Castilian Days,' born of a sojourn in sunny Spain, or his eloquent tributes to the patriots of this and other lands.

"He early excelled in literary efforts, and out of them it came to pass that he became consummate master of English speech. Reading, travel, observation, made him a full man, and a retentive memory enabled him to have his resources in command.

"Familiar with the vast possibilities of the English tongue, both for beauty and strength, his orations, addresses and state papers were always clear, luminous and strong, with ever a hint of poetic color and a virile imagination. Hearing him or reading his speeches, no one would imagine him to be the shrinking, reluctant man he was, averse to publicity and exceedingly difficult to bring to a positive engagement to make an address. So easy to us it seemed for him to open his mouth and so impossible for him to be commonplace—to speak without enlightening, to plead a great cause without carrying everything before him, in the ardor of his sincerity and the strength of

his convictions, in his scathing denunciations of that which aroused his antagonism; all this, as well as his remarkable conversational gifts, illustrate what is meant when speaking of him as a master of English speech.

“I wish next to turn your attention to the providential leadings by which he was prepared for the great work of his life, in which he won the recognition of crowned heads and the masters of the art of diplomacy as a man, their equal, surpassed by none.

“There was, of course, school, college and the study of law and then, the rarest school of all, the close intimacy, as private secretary for five years, with one who has been called ‘the greatest politician, the greatest statesman, the greatest man of his time,’ Abraham Lincoln. No man worthy to be called to such a post could possibly help being saturated by the spirit of this great and good man, nor ever get away from the lofty ideals which controlled him. It is my belief that no one thing ever happened

to Mr. Hay so influential in fitting him for the crowning work of his life.

“From this association he went forth to a training in diplomacy as seen in Paris, Vienna and Madrid—five years in these great centers of political activity as secretary of legation. Here again was a school of observation—how not to do it. This was an invaluable opportunity for studying European ways of courts, but also of the current methods and inner spirit of diplomats, ‘who,’ as he wittily put it, ‘when they seem coming are going, when they seem going they come.’

“His work on the editorial staff of the Tribune continued this acquaintance with foreign affairs for as many more years, and thus was he being prepared to deal with them when that responsibility became his.

“It was near the end of this period, in 1874, that he was united in wedlock with a daughter of this church, Miss Clara L. Stone. This was more than an affair of affection between two souls going forth into life, united ‘for better, for worse.’ It was besides, as we now see it, the opening wide

the door of opportunity to a freedom in work and a following of his bent, free of all concern for the ways and means of livelihood. The attempt to make him a business man, happily, failed. The man who had been the confidant of Lincoln in Washington, and secretary of legations in three great capitals of Europe, and had been on the staff of one of the foremost journals of New York, could not be at home in the routine of a business office. And so it came about that, after being Assistant Secretary of State with Mr. Evarts, years went into the writing of the life of Abraham Lincoln. In so doing, the period of the civil war and all that led up to it; the inside history of the perplexities, difficulties, failures and triumphs of the President, were lived over again; and the man, his motives, his charity, his great-heartedness, his sincerity, his humor, his tears, his faith in God and righteousness were studied and recorded; and if the years abroad and in New York had in any wise dimmed his impressions of his great master, they were burnished in this

long and painstaking study of the life of the martyred President.

"A long period thus elapsed, mainly in literary pursuits, before the last eight memorable years begin.

"Thirty-six years from the time he went to Washington with Lincoln he sets out as ambassador of this great republic to the most potent court of Europe and nearest of kin to ourselves. It was a sort of introduction to that court of all nations with which he was soon to deal. He was thus brought conspicuously before the world. Friendship with Great Britain was cemented; his talents as a diplomat were recognized, and it came to pass that he was trusted by men of all nations and faiths as few men ever have been. He was of diplomats the great peacemaker. If we ask for the secret of this confidence we shall find it in his ethical soundness, his candor, sincerity and truth, his straightforwardness and fairness. He lifted diplomacy out of the sphere of intrigue and falsehood—using words to conceal intentions rather than to convey meanings—into that of candor and frank-

ness. His secretaryship marks a new era in diplomacy and the dealings of nation with nation. He believed that compacts between nations, as with men, were made to be kept; that all conduct should be kept clear of sinister designs; that the belated peoples were entitled to consideration and fair dealing from the foremost; and when European powers were rushing forward to partition Asia as they had Africa, he stayed their hand. There came about such an alliance of moral influence—that might be backed by force, if need be—with Great Britain, that the English-speaking world to-day stands with open face towards the greatest continent of earth, and the United States is trusted because of the leadership of John Hay, Secretary of State.

“That ethical soundness came of an implicit faith in the righteousness of the Sermon on the Mount, as meant for life and conduct. With that deadly heresy that treats the teachings of Christ as an impracticable idealism, good for church but impossible on the street, he had nothing to do. No taint of this was on him. Nothing

of this did he learn from the martyr President, nor from the latest. And it is worth while to put emphasis here, in view of the widespread defection in morals that is the curse of the business world of to-day, and especially that part of the business world that deals in big figures and great transactions, and unblushingly affirms that a man may be as selfish as he will in business if he only uses his gains beneficently. The Golden Rule is not in all their thoughts. It was ever in John Hay's mind and often on his lips.

“Doing evil that good may come is not Christian. We are living in the day of warped consciences and debased ethics, and the high places of finance and of politics are full of selfishness and cruelty, of respectable thieves and liars, of professed sanctity and open contempt of righteousness. If this country was as perverse at the middle and at the bottom as it is at the top, I do not see what would save us.

“It is, therefore, the more necessary that we clearly see and frankly say that the man whom we love and mourn got his vantage

ground by none of these methods, but by cleanness of hands in His eyes, to whom righteousness is precious, by righteousness to rise. Thus are men and nations exalted. Thus Christian faith comes to its own, and pure religion and undefiled is vindicated as 'profitable unto all things.'

"John Hay was not, so far as I know, a member of any church. Once, in conversation with me, he stated his reason. It is characteristic. He said, 'My faith in Christ is implicit. I am a believer. I am in fullest sympathy with all that the church mainly stands for, but I feel that to unite with it formally I should be in full accord with its methods, creeds and aims; and I cannot go that far.' I do not affirm the verbal, but the substantial accuracy of this report. This is in keeping with that candor which insists that a man should be wholly what he seems. But it fails to make room for that difference in unity, which tolerates divergent opinions and minor beliefs while holding the essentials in harmony. Any other kind of unity is impossible. Once and again, when the invitation to the Lord's

table left with the communicant the responsibility for the act of communion, as a virtual confession of Christ, he remained with us. I think this was his habit.

“Coming upon such words as these following, not knowing the author, what should we say of him?

“‘Defend us, Lord, from every ill;
Strengthen us, Lord, to do thy will.
In all we plan, and all we do
Still keep us to thy service true.’

* * * * *

“‘Thou who art light, shine on each soul;
Thou who art truth, each mind control;
Open our eyes and make us see
The path which leads to heaven and thee.’

“Do not these stanzas breathe the pure Christian desire?

“It seems to me not unlikely that this hymn, written by him for the Christian Endeavorers when they met en masse in Washington, translated into many tongues, will carry his name over the world and down the centuries to come when his state papers are forgotten. Confession of Christ takes many forms and voices itself in deed as well

as words. Emptiest of all when in word and not in life.

“Just here, in the progress of this discourse, a letter was put into my hands from Dr. James H. Taylor, a classmate of mine in Union, in which I read, ‘When has our country produced a finer specimen of humanity? To see such is an assurance for the future of our country and our race!’ Yes, it is true. Other men are in the arena of life to-day. Others will yet arise, like minded and true, but it ever has been, ever must be, a rare thing to see beauty and strength, feminine delicacy and masculine virility, the wisdom of the serpent and the harmlessness of the dove, poetry and statesmanship, culture and righteousness, blended as they were in John Hay, beloved of men, the honored of nations, on whose head the blessings awarded the peacemaker rest.

“Four years ago a shadow fell across his path in the sudden death of his eldest son. It is my belief that to the last the man in the eye of the world was a man of sorrow. In the parting of the veil the shadow passed away forever.”

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